

Oral Questions

PROVISION OF NATURAL GAS TO EASTERN CANADA

Mr. John Evans (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, in a press release of December 4, the Foothills Pipe Lines group put forward some projections that there would be labour shortages in some of the key pipeline areas in eastern Canada and in western Canada where the Alaska pipeline and the Q and M pipeline and others would be laid down at the same time.

In view of the government's program to substitute gas for oil in eastern Canada, would the government give the assurance that these labour shortages will not delay the provision of natural gas for eastern Canada?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we will certainly take account of labour shortages and act to try to anticipate them. I am not sure whether the hon. member is suggesting that the position of the Liberal party is to oppose the Q and M pipeline and to oppose substitutions of natural gas for oil.

STOCKS OF HOME HEATING FUEL

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In its Friday statement on oil product supplies, the National Energy Board revealed that not only at the end of October were stocks in Canada of home heating fuel down by 6.3 per cent but, incredibly enough, exports from Canada for the same period of time were up by some 27 per cent. In a statement last Friday, the Prime Minister said the following:

We knew all along that shortages were possible.

He was referring to shortages of fuel oil this winter. In view of that statement, how could his government, during the six months it has been in office, possibly have permitted the exports to have taken place?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in some of the cases where exports took place, they took place as a result, as I understand it, of the fulfilment of a condition having to do with the construction of certain refinery capacity in plants and in areas where there was not likely to be, and indeed will not be, any shortage this winter.

I think the hon. member will understand the reports to which we were referring from the National Energy Board are reports that give us, as up-to-date as possible, an assessment by the National Energy Board of the possibility of shortages in a particular region at a particular point in time. The latest information is that there is the possibility now of some interruptions, although they can be avoided if there is control upon exports and if there is conservation practiced. My understanding is that companies which had been in the practice of exporting previously have not been exporting since October or November.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister confirm that had his government been on its toes for the past

[Mr. Clark.]

six months in this regard, instead of being faced with a 6 per cent shortfall of home heating fuel in Canada, compared to last year, in fact we would have had a 6 per cent surplus?

If he will admit that, could he possibly explain, in the case of Irving Company, why that company was permitted to increase its exports very substantially during the precise period to which the Prime Minister referred in his comment on Friday, that the rest of us, particularly in Ontario and eastern Canada, could be anticipating shortages?

Mr. Clark: Yes, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I reject the invitation to make the statement that the hon member extended to me. With regard to the Irving plant, my understanding is that in November, Irving had very little in the way of exports; that in terms of Irving's service areas, no area has been short of heating oil or heavy oil; that last month Irving was denied a number of export licences because there was not a great surplus.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, there are no shortages yet, but it has been the Prime Minister and others who have warned about the shortages which will come this winter. Because I checked just before noon today, would the Prime Minister confirm that the National Energy Board now is still permitting exports to take place, and that it has before it applications for permits which will allow companies to export more home heating fuel later on this winter? In answering those questions, and I think the answer will be unequivocally in the affirmative—

An hon. Member: Then why ask?

Mr. Broadbent: —could the Prime Minister explain to the House and to the people of Canada why he has not issued an instruction to the NEB that no more exports of home heating fuel should take place in Canada this year?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I will check into those matters on which the Leader of the New Democratic Party has informed himself, but they are details on which I have not yet been informed. I will not only look into the particular questions the Leader of the New Democratic Party has asked; I will also look into the existence of any other conditions that, if the case he suggests is in fact true, would have led the National Energy Board to make that kind of authorization.

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

REQUEST FOR PRECISE DETAILS ON SUPPLY SITUATION FOR INDEPENDENTS

Mr. Fabien Roy (Beauce): Mr. Speaker, my question, which is also directed to the right hon. Prime Minister, naturally deals with the energy issue. In his letter to us which was included as an appendix to *Hansard* of last November 6, the Prime Minister indicated the steps his government had taken to reassure the people of Quebec and the maritime provinces, that is to say, eastern Canada, concerning oil supply security.